

IV. Steps to Enhance and Sustain National Park Service Partnerships

The workshop discussions generated many ideas for addressing the challenges of building long-term partnerships and creating effective National Park Service (NPS) collaborations. This section summarizes these ideas, but does not offer detailed prescriptions for implementation. Much of what follows is directed at enhancing the effectiveness of the NPS as a partner. Through additional dialogue within the agency and with collaborating organizations, the NPS and its partners can further develop specific actions for more effective partnerships to conserve the important cultural and natural heritage of the United States.

➤ **Create additional opportunities to learn from partnership experiences, involving both NPS staff and partner representatives.** To be a learning organization, the NPS must develop opportunities for evaluation and feedback from both agency staff and partners. Since NPS partnerships are evolving rapidly, it is essential to continually evaluate the partnership models and hone the necessary expertise and collaborative leadership skills that lead to success over the long term. Incorporating this understanding of what it takes to achieve successful collaborations will enable both NPS staff and partners to strengthen local partnerships. Gathering the stories of successful partnerships can enhance understanding of collaborative work, and can build support for partnerships within the NPS and with important constituencies. In addition, participants specifically noted that the vocabulary for the diversity of partnership arrangements has not kept up with the evolution of practice. Participants suggested the following ideas for creating additional learning opportunities:

- Organize, perhaps on an annual basis, additional workshops such as the workshop upon which this report is based, in order to share lessons and to collectively reflect on future directions for this type of conservation. Future workshops should expand the participation of partners from other regions of the country, paying particular attention to groups who represent diverse populations or urban constituencies.
- Capitalize on the extensive experience of the Rivers and Trails Conservation Assistance Program in planning ongoing partnership training opportunities.

1. Spring Plowing Match at Billings Farm & Museum in Woodstock, Vermont. The museum is a working dairy farm and a museum of agricultural and rural life operated by the Woodstock Foundation. The museum works in partnership with Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park to continue a shared legacy of land stewardship. Photo by Jon Gilbert Fox, courtesy of Billings Farm & Museum.



2. A scene along the seven-mile corridor of the Augusta Canal National Heritage Area in Georgia. The canal transformed Augusta into an important regional industrial area on the eve of the Civil War, and played a key role in the post-Civil War relocation of much of the nation's textile industry to the south. Photo by Judy Hart.



3. Informational materials on the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor. The NPS makes a key contribution to many partnerships by providing skilled interpretive and technical assistance, important here to the Corridor's tourism and regional educational efforts. Photo courtesy of Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor.



4. The Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, established in 1996. The 54-mile trail commemorates the 1965 voting rights march led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., along U.S. Highway 80 from Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church in Selma, Alabama, to the state capitol in Montgomery. The march helped inspire passage of the voting rights legislation signed into law by President Johnson in August 1965. Photos by Barbara Tagger.



5. Waterman on the Chesapeake Bay. Traditional livelihoods and ways of living, which are based on the Bay's unique natural resources, are integral to the region's stories and culture. The fate of these livelihoods, at risk due to degradation and overuse of resources, rests on conservation and restoration efforts. Restoration in turn depends upon education that fosters understanding, which is at the heart of the mission of the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network. Photo courtesy of Virginia Tourism Corporation.



6. A ranger-led tour of Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park in Woodstock, Vermont, overlooking the fields of the Billings Farm. Photo courtesy of Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park.

7. Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore along Lake Superior in Michigan. The North Country Trail crosses the top of these multicolored sandstone cliffs. Photo by Tom Gilbert.



- Compile a series of case studies on partnerships and partnership areas. Such a compilation of best practices could be distributed to professionals involved in similar work within and outside the NPS and could also be presented in various training programs. Case studies could include such information as the legislative framework, innovations, and reflections on the successes and failures from a variety of perspectives.
- Expand training opportunities for NPS employees, partners, and other conservation professionals that specifically focus on making partnerships work. Professional development in such areas as collaborative leadership, facilitation, and conflict management was suggested.
- Create a mentorship program and a means for identifying individuals with the potential to be especially successful in partner relationships.
- Simplify the language used to describe partnerships and collaborative work to encourage greater understanding of the benefits both within and outside the NPS. More thought should be given to terms that are accessible to diverse audiences.
- Seek terminology which conveys parity to partnership areas and traditional national parks and furthers the concept of a nationwide network of parks and conservation areas. Clarify agency nomenclature to reduce the confusion within existing descriptions of national parks and other conservation areas (see page 5, “Current Definitions from the Index of the National Park Service,” which was taken from recent NPS literature).

≈ **Develop means for recognizing the successes and contributions of partnership areas and programs, and for rewarding the individuals who make them work.** Workshop participants believe it essential to increase understanding and build additional support within the agency for partnership areas. They suggested highlighting success stories and the people involved; emphasizing the benefits of partnership areas to staff throughout the agency; and in particular cultivating support within the NPS leadership for partnership initiatives, new types of park areas, and partnership programs. More widespread understanding of the role partnerships can play in conserving the American landscape would enable the NPS to be a more effective partner and leader. Ways to give a higher profile to partnership areas and the individuals who make them work could include:

- Provide information on the home page of the NPS website, such as listing the different partnership area categories outside of the National Park System, the criteria for eligibility, information on local responsibilities, and the opportunities for financial, technical, and planning assistance.
- Include information on partnership areas and programs in all NPS internal bulletin boards and publications.
- Provide information and explain the benefits of partnership programs and areas in NPS materials for the general public.
- Recognize annually those individuals within the agency and partner organizations who have made outstanding contributions in advancing partnerships.

≈ **Provide new tools and more flexibility in NPS planning and management of partnerships and partnership areas.** Workshop participants would like to see availability of new tools and additional flexibility within the existing NPS planning programs to better facilitate collaborative planning and management and to meet the different needs of partnership areas. In addition, participants commented on the importance of more effectively engaging partners and local communities in planning and management activities, and often referred to “buy-in” or “empowerment” of a wide diversity of people. They stressed the need to use an open process that transcends traditional public involvement. Participants also suggested a phased approach to designating new partnership areas that would strengthen relationships with key partners prior to designation. Some of the suggestions that follow may require some restructuring of the NPS budget formulation and allocation process to provide greater flexibility and support for partnership areas and programs.

- Add a technical assistance component to existing planning programs that addresses collaborative planning projects.
- Build a capacity for “hot-spot” planning and assistance to provide for quick response and innovation.
- Consider amending the traditional NPS “one-size-fits-all” planning framework to better accommodate areas that require a longer planning time frame, technical assistance, and an investment strategy.

- Open up the traditional public involvement process of planning and management to encourage ongoing local engagement and to build participation by diverse audiences.
- In designating new partnership areas, consider using the early stages of public involvement to build lasting relationships with potential partners. One possible model used successfully by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Program to study and designate several mostly privately owned river corridors has the following four phases:
 - Determine eligibility with full public involvement;
 - If determined eligible, conduct management planning with local communities and other key stakeholders and, if applicable, identify a management entity;
 - Undertake demonstration projects to assess long-term feasibility;
 - Determine whether to seek authorization/designation and in what form.

≈ **Revise management approaches to staff transition in partnership areas to retain institutional memory and ensure continuity of partner relationships.** Throughout the NPS and in partner organizations, managers are spending more and more time and energy on cultivating partnerships of all kinds. Since successful collaborations rely on building relationships, longer staff tenures are critical. Inevitably, however, key personnel do move on, and the NPS and its partners must facilitate as smooth a management transition as possible. Recognizing those people who have played key roles in the partnership can be an important part of the transition.

- Find ways during transition of key partnership staff to capture critical institutional memory, and work to maintain momentum, continuity, and personal communication between the NPS and partner organizations.
- Recognize and appropriately honor the contributions of individuals who have built and sustained these relationships over time.

≈ **Develop clearer direction on the appropriate application of NPS management policies and other federal guidelines and requirements in partnership areas.** Workshop participants identified the lack of clarity on the application of existing NPS guidelines as a hindrance to effectiveness in partnership areas. This ambiguity surrounding guidelines means that

NPS staff and partners frequently do not have a common understanding of the implications of federal designation, and as a result have different expectations for NPS and partner roles. Therefore, consider the following:

- Clarify the application of NPS guidelines for all new partnership areas, including national heritage areas and affiliated areas;
- Define the appropriate application of NPS standards (for example, NPS maintenance and accessibility standards) to nonfederal lands in a partnership area; and
- Provide more specific guidance on the full universe of federal technical and financial assistance that may be available to partnership areas.